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N.C. public works earn mediocre grade

Engineers' report says billions of dollars are needed to fix the state's infrastructure

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North Carolina needs to invest tens of billions of dollars to rejuvenate its aging roads, schools and water systems and to support economic growth, a professional engineers' group said in a report released Monday.

The American Society of Civil Engineers issued a mediocre overall grade -- C-minus -- for nine public works categories reviewed in its first North Carolina Infrastructure Report Card.

Citing safety concerns, the engineers gave their lowest mark, a D grade, to the state's 5,250 dams. One out of five dams is rated "high hazard" because failure could cause death and significant property loss downstream, the report said, but none of these dams has an emergency plan that meets federal safety guidelines.

The state's roads also earned a D grade for poor pavement condition, worsening congestion and a widening shortfall in funds needed to keep up with traffic growth. North Carolina trails most states in supplying enough roads to handle congestion, the report said.



Wyatt Wiggleton puts the finishing touches Monday on a water line repair at East Millbrook Middle School, which could receive \$29 million for renovations and new construction from a bond proposal on the ballot in Wake County in November. A report by a national civil engineering group gave the state's schools a C-minus.
Staff Photo by Travis Long

North Carolina's poor grades

See below...

"Congested highways, outdated schools, corroding bridges -- they're all constant reminders, and you see them all around you," Grant K. Autry of Raleigh, a former president of the engineering group's 2,500-member North Carolina chapter, said at a news conference. "The infrastructure situation out there is a looming crisis that jeopardizes our nation's prosperity and our quality of life."

The call for more public works spending would create more work for members of the engineering group. Civil engineers make their living designing bridges, water systems and other structures. The organization has produced similar studies in other states, and its most recent national assessment gave the nation's infrastructure system a D grade last year.

Two state House members endorsed the engineers' report, but they were not ready to suggest how North Carolina should pay the big repair bills.

"North Carolina citizens have got to come forward and say, 'We want these things,' and develop a bipartisan effort of all the legislators to do what's right for North Carolina," said Rep. Nelson Cole, a Reidsville Democrat and co-chairman of the House transportation appropriations subcommittee.

Rep. Bill Daughtridge, a Rocky Mount Republican who co-chairs the House Commerce Committee, said economic growth would help finance some of the needed improvements.

North Carolina's poor grades

The American Society of Civil Engineers gave North Carolina an overall grade of C-minus for the quality of its roads, bridges and other public works -- and the state's ability to provide enough money to keep up with needed improvements. Here's how engineers graded the state in nine categories.

Airports: D+

Bridges: C-

Dams: D

Drinking water: C+

Rail: B-

Roads: D

Schools: C-

Storm water: C-

Wastewater: C-

TO SEE THE FULL REPORT, GO ONLINE: http://sections.asce.org/n_carolina/ReportCard.html

(2006 NORTH CAROLINA INFRASTRUCTURE REPORT CARD, AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS)

"In addition to that ...," Daughtridge said, "we're going to have to look at some new and innovative ideas to fund some of these things."



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